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*The Quakers in the
Old Northwest*

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BY

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Indiana State Library

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THE QUAKERS IN THE OLD NORTHWEST

BY HARLOW LINDLEY

Pennsylvania was one of the last of the English Colonies formed in America. The favorable terms offered by William Penn caused such a rapid immigration to the Colony that the parts near Philadelphia were soon occupied and there was a demand for fresh lands, which resulted in the expansion of the Colony to the southwest away from the coast, as the lands near the coast were already settled. By 1725 the settlements of Friends had passed the Susquehanna River westward and were well on their way to the Potomac southward.

About 1730, a company composed principally of Friends, with Alexander Ross and James Wright at the head of it, secured a grant from the government of Virginia of one hundred thousand acres of land in the valley of the Shenandoah River. This brought about a rapid immigration to that region, the settlers being largely Friends. The leading community appears to have been Hopewell, five miles north of Winchester in Frederick County, Virginia, which was well established by 1735. Soon after the settlement was made around Winchester, other Friends settled in Loudoun and Fairfax counties, about forty miles east of Winchester.

Both of these settlements now became centers of immigration further to the south producing a chain of meetings across Virginia and well into the Carolinas. The trouble with the Indians in Virginia during the French and Indian War hastened the immigration southward where the Indians on the border were more peaceable, and thus the Friends settlements already begun were strengthened in the interior of North Carolina, partic-

ularly those of New Garden in Guilford County and Cane Creek in Orange County, which had their origin about 1750.

The immigration continuing southward entered South Carolina soon after 1760, and in a few years large and prosperous settlements of Friends were formed in Union and Newberry counties, South Carolina, and in Columbia County, Georgia. These northern immigrants were also joined by some families that came direct from England and Ireland. These settlements, made by the immigrants from the Northern Colonies in the Carolinas and Georgia, mark what may be called the replanting of Quakerism in the South, and it is from these communities to a large extent that the migrations to the Northwest were made.

✕ With these brief statements with reference to the settlement of the Quakers in the South, we pass to the causes which induced them to leave their homes and migrate to the Northwest. ✕ Their location in the Southland was very desirable and pleasant as far as outward comfort and ease were concerned. We are told that no finer body of land could be found in South Carolina than that embraced within their limits in that State. Their communities were prosperous, their meetings were harmonious and pleasant, and there was a loving fellowship among them as brethren of the same household of faith. But as the eighteenth century grew to a close, there was unrest among them and a general feeling that a change of location was desirable. When these Friends were moving into the Southern provinces because of the balmy climate and fertile land, they perhaps little thought that the very institution which was produced and fostered by such conditions would be the cause of their deserting their homes and friends and starting life again in a new country.

At a time when human slavery seemed to be the nat-

ural order of events, when the advancement of civilization itself seemed to depend upon it, the Society of Friends appealed to the universal consciences of mankind and stood as opponents of the system of slavery. Friends at first, in common with others, held slaves to some extent, but there was all the time a protest against the practice as inconsistent with the Christian profession. When they located in South Carolina and Georgia, slavery was still tolerated among them, but in the years of their residence there the Society had taken a very advanced position on the subject. It can easily be seen that the change of sentiment had been gradual and a result of heartfelt conviction. One by one it was laid upon their hearts and consciences that it was wrong to hold their fellowmen in bondage, and they freed their slaves. This conviction spread and soon became the concern of the whole Society. By persistent persuasion the Society as a body became united on the subject. This pronounced stand of course put them in opposition to the prevailing sentiment of the country. Migration to the Northwest began in 1795 and by 1800 there were six Friends settlements in Ohio — three in Ross County, two in Warren County, and one in Lawrence County.

In 1799 the migration from South Carolina began. The Census of 1800 shows that in the preceding decade the slaves of Newberry County increased twenty-five per cent, while the white population was stationary. This showed the Friends the disadvantage to which their free labor would soon be put in competition with slave labor. In 1803, a Friends minister named Zachariah Dicks passed through South Carolina visiting the Bush River meeting and the Wrightsboro, Georgia, meeting. He was thought to have the gift of prophecy. He warned Friends to come out of slavery. At Wrightsboro he told the Friends of a terrible internecine war not far in the future, during which many men would flee to the mountains and

call on the mountains to hide them. He said the child was then born that would see it. He also advised them to leave Wrightsboro, which they did. This was forty-eight years before the predicted war came. [At Bush River he went into particulars and depicted the silence and loneliness that would attend the house in which he was then speaking after its abandonment by those who had erected it and said that herbage would ere long grow in its now well beaten paths. These statements¹ were preceded by "O Bush River! Bush River! how hath thy beauty faded away and gloomy darkness eclipsed thy day!"

Zachariah Dicks's visit no doubt had a bearing upon the removal of Friends to the Northwest. The first to remove after this occurrence was John Jay, in 1803, soon after Dicks's visit; and by 1807 the Quaker settlement in Newberry amounted to only eleven heads of families. Judge O'Neal of South Carolina says:² "Newberry thus lost from a foolish panic and a superstitious fear of an institution which never harmed them or any other party a very valuable portion of its white population."

But other causes operated as well, for, while the exodus was particularly marked among Friends, yet others were moving in the same direction at the same time. The Appalachian Mountains had long been looked upon as a barrier against savage invasion on the one hand, and as one against removing to an unexplored and unknown wilderness on the other, but recent events had very materially changed the situation. In 1775 Daniel Boone who by the way was a Quaker, crossed the mountains through the Cumberland Gap, and later, over the "Wilderness Road" thus opened, passed many of the pioneers of the Southern Colonies.

The settlement of the Quakers in the Northwest wa

¹ O'Neal's *Annals of Newberry*, p. 330.

² O'Neal's *Annals of Newberry*, p. 35.

a part of the westward movement of population seeking more freedom or better economic opportunities. This new Northwest Territory then being opened to settlers, with its fundamental Ordinance dedicating it forever to freedom and free institutions, proved to be the land which would fulfil the vision of these Southern Friends. And they were not disobedient to the vision opened before them, but came with great rapidity as a vanguard to a mighty host that soon followed. The South Carolina Friends came first to Miami ^{County}, Ohio, and found some Friends from Guilford County, North Carolina, who had come the year before. | The Miami Monthly Meeting, the first Friends business meeting established in the Northwest Territory, was opened in 1803. For the next four years the names of all Friends located in western Ohio and eastern Indiana who brought removal certificates are given in the records of the Miami Monthly Meeting. The dates of issues of these certificates and by what meeting issued are also given. The number of such certificates issued in the four years, 1803-1807, is four hundred, transferring the membership of 1826 persons to that meeting. These certificates came from forty monthly meetings, representing four yearly meetings.

From the one monthly meeting in Georgia there came twenty-eight certificates for one hundred and fifty-five persons; from the two monthly meetings in South Carolina there came one hundred and forty-three certificates for six hundred and fifty-five persons, making one hundred and ten persons from this section of the South, or about four-ninths of the whole number. From eleven monthly meetings in North Carolina, there came ninety certificates for three hundred and eighty-seven persons; and from two monthly meetings in Tennessee there came forty-five certificates for two hundred and twenty-one persons, making in these four years three hundred and six certificates from sixteen monthly meetings belonging

to North Carolina Yearly Meeting for one thousand four hundred and eighteen members, or seven-ninths of the whole emigration. Of the remaining two-ninths, or four hundred and eight persons, two hundred and sixty-nine were from Virginia; twenty-five were from Maryland; forty-five were from Pennsylvania; and sixty-nine were from New Jersey. Some of the new meetings established in Ohio were practically the old meetings of the South transferred to Northern soil.

Friends who had moved westward from the Ohio settlements or who had come direct from North Carolina and Virginia were among the first settlers in the eastern part of Indiana, and very early in the century North Carolina Friends commenced to make settlements in southern and western Indiana.

In North Carolina an ex-post-facto law, enacted in 1777, re-enslaved black persons who had been set free by their masters without conforming to certain forms not required at the time that the emancipations were made. North Carolina's claim to Tennessee was also ceded to the general government of the United States in 1789 with the proviso "that always no regulation made or to be made by Congress shall tend to emancipate slaves."

This occurred after Congress had excluded slavery from all the territory northwest of the Ohio River. With this start, Tennessee came into the Union in 1796 with a pro-slavery constitution. In 1799 Kentucky adopted a new constitution confirming slavery after a warm and thorough discussion. The establishment of slavery in Tennessee and Kentucky destroyed all hope that either State would afford pleasant abiding places, although Friends had located in both of them. They held that the blight had now obtained was too firm to justify any hope for change. Hence the anti-slavery people in these States, and indeed in the entire South, saw that there was no resting place for them until they reached the country

beyond the Ohio River, where the foundation for the future local governments prescribed that there should be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude otherwise than in punishment for crime. The Ordinance of 1787 was in itself an important influence in bringing people to the Northwest. The immigrant to this Territory knew beforehand that this was a land of the highest political as well as national promise. He knew what society, laws, rights, privileges, and opportunities the future would bring.

The early Quaker settlers in Virginia and the Carolinas had taken the lead in the struggle for toleration during the first half of the eighteenth century as the Presbyterians did in the second half. They had become the largest organized body of dissenters in these Southern Colonies and were persecuted in Virginia and disenfranchised in the Carolinas. In North Carolina they struggled not only for religious but also for political rights. Their residence in North Carolina was also often made unpleasant during and after the Revolutionary War. Their thrift no less than their non-resistance made their property the prey of the British tax-gatherers before the War and of marauders of both parties during the War. After the War their anti-slavery sentiments made their surroundings uncomfortable to people of their feelings, while the existence of the "peculiar institution" rendered unfavorable the prospects of persons of the non-slaveholding class, especially such persons as must depend upon their own labor for their livelihood and advancement in life. At the same time in which the Quakers, under the influence of the preaching and writings of John Woolman, Benjamin Lay, Anthony Benezet and others, had rapidly advanced to a decided anti-slavery position, the upholders of slavery in North Carolina had taken every favorable opportunity to strengthen the system of human bondage. A petition to Congress in 1797 showed that one hundred and thirty-four black persons

set free by Quakers were again reduced to servitude under the authority of this ex post facto law already aluded to.

Their activity and opposition to slavery brought upon the Quakers both at home and in the debates in Congress the bitter abuse of the advocates of the doctrine of "property in man". For their own feelings and for the welfare of their children many determined to leave the South. Thus a second generation had not grown up in North Carolina before the Society began to consider the proposition of removing. In many instances the sons of the men who had come from Pennsylvania were among those who were now leaving North Carolina. Even some born in Pennsylvania lived to come to Ohio and Indiana with their Carolina-born children.

Since slavery had been one of the chief causes for the Quaker movement to the Northwest, it was only to be expected that they would maintain their interest in the subject. There was not a year from the establishment of Friends in the Northwest until the slave was freed but what their attention was called officially to the subject in an annual query asking whether Friends bore a testimony against slavery. Committees were likewise appointed on "Concerns of the People of Colour". The legislatures of the States formed from the Northwest Territory were frequently petitioned on the subject of the so-called "Black Laws". The Friends officially memorialized Congress frequently on the subject of slavery, and they were especially emphatic in their opposition to the admission of Texas. Their most immediate labors in behalf of the slaves were, however, exerted in the activities of the Underground Railroad, one Friend having assisted three thousand negroes northward and another expressing regret that he had only had the opportunity of assisting two thousand seven hundred when the Emancipation Proclamation was issued.

While Friends in the Northwest were a unit in their

opposition to slavery, they could not agree as to the best method of accomplishing the desired end and in 1843 we meet the peculiar situation of a separation in the church, the conservative element standing for gradual emancipation and the development of a healthful public sentiment against the system, and the radical element demanding the immediate abolition of the system.

One can not leave this phase of the subject without mentioning Charles Osborn, who in 1814 organized the first manumission society in the South and in 1817 at Mt. Pleasant, Ohio, established the first anti-slavery paper, which was followed in 1821 by the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* edited by Benjamin Lundy, another Friend, who had been interested in publication by Charles Osborn. Three anti-slavery papers were issued by Friends at Fountain City, Indiana, during the forties and these no doubt exerted considerable influence at that time.

While as a rule Friends preferred to exert themselves as a religious body rather than through immediate political channels, their influence was felt directly. The final status of slavery in Indiana was determined after a long and vigorous contest, in every stage of which the Friends were a factor after they had entered the Territory. They were a determining factor in the campaign of 1810 when the anti-slavery forces triumphed in the election of a representative to the United States Congress and expressed themselves by petitions and through one of their members who was a delegate in the first Constitutional Convention. It is worthy of note that Edwin M. Stanton of Ohio came of a long line of Quaker ancestry as did George W. Julian of Indiana.

The Quakers being opposed to slavery supported the Whig or Free Soil parties until the formation of the Republican Party when they joined it. Theodore Clark Smith says, in his *Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the North West*, concerning the election of 1844: "In In-

diana the anti-slavery counties are those in which the Quakers lived. . . . There were New Englanders in the state but they were as yet not waked up." A study of the election returns of the State shows that as a rule those counties which contain a large number of Quakers are Republican, and there is no doubt but that the question of slavery was the principal force in causing the Quakers to become Republicans. The same reforming characteristics have caused many of the Quakers to ally themselves with the Prohibition Party since its organization.

In the early history of the State of Indiana, illiteracy was alarming but the Friends had schools organized while Indiana was still a Territory and they later developed a system of schools which set a standard for the system of public education established later. As a result of close supervision and the home training of Friends' children, the moral standard of these schools was very high and they were largely freed from the roughness and rowdiness which brought many a school-master in the early half of the nineteenth century to grief and failure. By 1850 the Friends had worked out a regular system of education for their children. Practically every community had its subscription school which was under the supervision of the local meeting. The same plan was pursued in Ohio, Illinois, and even in Michigan and Wisconsin.

Owing to local conditions, it was not advisable for each school to offer advanced work, but there were in each community a few pupils who wished to take more advanced work. As a result, certain schools were established which offered both elementary and more advanced courses. These schools corresponded to and later became modern high schools.

As shown by the yearly meeting reports on the subject of education there were in 1840, in the limits of the yearly meeting seven thousand six hundred and fifty-one

children of school age and of this number only three hundred and nineteen, or about one in twenty-four, were not in school. In the same year, according to Boone's *History of Education*, one-seventh of the population was illiterate. The school legislation in Indiana for thirty years had accomplished very little, and the condition of education was arousing much public sentiment. As a result a system of free schools was adopted after a hard fight by the State in 1848, but difficulties were encountered and very little was accomplished, especially along the lines of advanced education. The first attempt to establish a public high school in Indiana was in Evansville in 1850, while the Friends, by 1850, had twelve well organized schools doing advanced work which would compare favorably with our modern high schools. By 1867, eighteen high schools had been opened but some of these had been discontinued because of lack of funds, while by the same year the Friends had established twenty schools with advanced courses.

A Boarding School was established at Mt. Pleasant, Ohio, in 1837, and in 1845 a Manual Labor Institute was opened at Bloomingdale in western Indiana. By 1832 the Friends were considering definite plans for a denominational college which resulted in Earlham College which was opened in 1847. These facts are significant when the relatively small number of members is taken into consideration.

✕ One of the leading characteristics of the Friends as a society has been their deep interest and activity in philanthropic and charitable work. This has been directed toward the Indians, negroes, and the pauper and criminal classes. The Friends of Philadelphia began an active campaign in behalf of the Indians in the Northwest Territory in 1791. Schools were established among them in Ohio and Indiana and from that time forward a direct and permanent interest in the affairs of the In-

dians in the Northwest was maintained. ✕ Elizabeth Comstock of Michigan, a Friends minister, visited more jails, reformatories, and penitentiaries in various parts of the Union than any other person in her time and has since been called the "Elizabeth Fry of America".

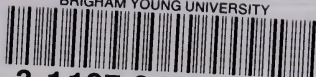
While Friends have been very active in prison reform since the days of George Fox, who had occasion to recognize the need of prison reform, no organization of Friends has officially undertaken the work except in Indiana. The first committee was appointed in 1867, and it is no exaggeration to affirm that their action was largely responsible for the establishment of the Boys' Reform School in 1869, of the Woman's Prison in 1873 (three of whose four superintendents have been Friends), and of the Indiana Board of State Charities.

In conclusion I can not refrain from alluding to one other line of Quaker activity. In 1819 when Jonathan Jennings was Governor of the State, when James Monroe was President of the United States, and Abraham Lincoln was a ten year old boy in Spencer County, Indiana, fifty-seven men, of whom thirty-nine were Quakers, met at Salem, Indiana, and organized the Salem Peace Society. A descendant of one of these Quakers has since 1892 been General Secretary of the American Peace Society and has made many trips abroad in the interests of peace and international arbitration; and the son of another in 1878 made a visit to St. Petersburg to lay before the Czar a memorial praying for exemption from military duty of all Russian subjects who had conscientious scruples against war, and urging upon the Czar the adoption of arbitration as a substitute for war. So it is not unreasonable to conclude that the Quakers of Indiana may have had some part in the influences which finally resulted in the establishment of the Hague Court.

✕ To the Quaker holiness was his daily walk. It was his daily speech, his dress and address, his worship, his

every mien and performance. The impulses of his soul were the dynamics of his deeds and it seems that in their quiet way, the Quakers have exerted an influence in the Old Northwest quite beyond what might have been expected of them as far as numbers are concerned.

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